



NEWS RELEASE

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As cranes face growing threats, Wisconsin legislators push to establish hunting season on Sandhill Cranes

March 25, 2025

For the third time in 14 years, the Wisconsin Legislature is again attempting to mandate the state's Department of Natural Resources to create a Sandhill Crane hunting season. The International Crane Foundation is disappointed by the legislature's continued attempts to tie crop damage relief for farmers to a Sandhill Crane hunt, which is a [widely unpopular proposal](#) for the people of the state. Though there is no evidence that a hunt will provide relief to farmers experiencing crop damage by cranes, there are other, more effective ways we can support farmers experiencing these issues.

Current Threats and Concerns

Wisconsin is a vital breeding area for Sandhill Cranes. As threats to North America's two species of cranes (the Sandhill Crane and the Endangered Whooping Crane) grow, our research tells us that now is not the time for a hunt in Wisconsin—no matter how strongly some feel about the issue.

- **Avian Influenza:** Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is currently causing significant die offs of Sandhill Cranes in the Eastern Population. In Indiana alone, at least 2,000 Sandhill Cranes died of the virus in February, accounting for potentially 2% of the Eastern Population's roughly 100,000 individuals. This population migrates through the eastern United States and is the population that would be subject to a hunt in Wisconsin on their breeding grounds. HPAI is an unpredictable variable in the stability of crane populations—now is not the time for further hunting pressures in Wisconsin.
- **Whooping Crane Poaching:** The fragile, reintroduced Whooping Crane population in Wisconsin is highly vulnerable to accidental shootings. It is oft remarked that hunters would never mistakenly shoot a Whooping Crane while hunting Sandhill Cranes, but that is not the case. Tragically, in 2021, the largest Whooping Crane poaching incident in recent history

occurred in Oklahoma. [In one event](#), five Whooping Cranes—approximately 1% of the entire wild population—were killed by Sandhill Crane hunters.

- **Out-of-Date Management Plan:** The Eastern Population Sandhill Crane management plan is 15 years out-of-date. It is irresponsible to base major wildlife management decisions on an antiquated management plan. This should be updated prior to any further discussion of a hunt.

Meaningful Solutions

There are multiple distinct issues at hand, including the resolution of crop damage for farmers and the promotion of a recreational hunting season. The International Crane Foundation advocates for decoupling these two separate and different issues, and implementing real, meaningful solutions to crop damage.

Advocates of a Sandhill Crane hunting season have long promoted it as the solution to crop damage, but we know a hunting season is not going to help farmers. The science presented by experts to the [Legislative Study Committee on Sandhill Cranes](#) last year made clear that hunting will not provide any meaningful assistance to farmers.

In February, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers [announced proposed budget investments](#) of more than \$3.7 million to reimburse corn farmers up to 50 percent of the total cost of purchasing seed treatment that discourages birds, especially Sandhill Cranes, from eating their seed. This proposed funding is not tied to a hunting season and would be administered by the state's agricultural agency.

Since our founding more than 52 years ago, the Foundation has been devoted to science-based conservation of cranes and the wetland and grassland habitats upon which they rely. As next steps are taken in regard to these issues in Wisconsin, we remain committed to these central tenets of our mission.

The International Crane Foundation (ICF) works worldwide to conserve cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds, and flyways on which they depend. We provide knowledge, leadership, and inspiration to engage people in resolving threats to cranes and their diverse landscapes. From its nearly 300-acre headquarters in Baraboo, Wisconsin, the ICF reach extends across the globe, with offices and staff in China, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, and South Africa, as well as Texas. It works through strong partnerships with local organizations, governments, universities, businesses, and others in these regions. More than 135 ICF staff and associates work with a network of hundreds of specialists in 50 countries on five continents.

The Foundation is committed to a future where all 15 of the world's crane species are secure. Through the charisma of cranes, ICF envisions a future where people work together for wild crane populations and the landscapes they depend on – and by doing so, find new pathways to sustain our water, land, and livelihoods. Visit www.savingcranes.org for more information and to support the work of ICF.

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